

CASE STUDY

StarsBI

How CarbonCents used its university partnerships to revolutionize the approach towards STARS reporting.

Overview

Clemson University, a public research institution in South Carolina, has long demonstrated its commitment to environmental stewardship. This dedication was formalized in 2009 when Clemson signed the President's Climate Commitment and developed a comprehensive Sustainability Action Plan. Since then, Clemson has steadily advanced its sustainability efforts, and in 2023, the university partnered with CarbonCents to build on these efforts and enhance its Sustainability Tracking, Assessment & Rating System (STARS) report. Developed by AASHE, STARS serves as a global benchmark for university sustainability, helping institutions measure and improve their environmental impact.

Challenge

Clemson's previous STARS report format laid a solid foundation, emphasizing the importance of engagement, yet offered opportunities for further enhancement. Without the needed environment, stakeholders found it challenging to pinpoint actionable steps and leverage the report for advancing sustainability. As a result, the report was almost set aside, lacking the guidance needed for practical follow-through.

Recognizing the value of a more adaptable reporting approach, Clemson prioritized a refreshed design to foster growth toward a greener university.

Leveraging its relationships with universities, CarbonCents recognized this need and set out to develop a new approach that would provide a clearer, more actionable path for advancing sustainability efforts.

Solution

Clemson partnered with CarbonCents to help revamp and elevate their STARS reporting with a fresh, innovative approach to data visualization and analysis. To address challenges with data transparency and actionable insights, CarbonCents developed a tailored solution, StarsBI. The interactive dashboard, StarsBI, allows stakeholders to explore the uploaded STARS report data in a new way with intuitive visualizations and navigation tools. StarsBI opens with an overview of the STARS framework and Clemson's specific sustainability goals, guiding users seamlessly through the various tabs that showcase key performance indicators, sustainability metrics, and progress visuals.

Stakeholders can easily access insights on credit criteria, scoring, and the steps needed for improvements, offering transparency and guidance which was previously unavailable. By consolidating critical data in one user-friendly platform, StarsBI provides Clemson with a tool for real-time progress tracking, empowering data-informed decisions toward their sustainability goals.

The completion of the STARS report itself involved months of data collection, analysis, and communication. CarbonCents streamlined this process through integration with Microsoft Teams Channel. In this channel, individuals identified as potential liaisons for any given credit were added to the respective Teams folder. These folders served as the central location containing all necessary resources for the liaisons' participation. This simplified data collection for both parties, leading to a more efficient project timeline.



Results

Clemson achieved their highest-ever STARS score, 61.5 points compared to 53.85 in 2018, a 14% increase. This reflects a significant improvement in both sustainability performance and the effectiveness of their reporting.

With StarsBI, Clemson cut down the time it took to generate the report by 23%, and internal feedback highlighted the tool's ease of use and the clarity it provided in presenting complex sustainability data.

StarsBI not only increased engagement among stakeholders by providing a more intuitive and interactive platform, but it also facilitated better decision-making by presenting the data in a more comprehensive format. Through the short-, mid-, and long-term goals identified for improvements on each credit, stakeholders can do just that, making it that much easier to identify areas for quick improvements and areas that require a longer-term commitment. Rankings were also assigned to each credit to easily quantify how well a university is doing on a specific credit.

With enhanced tracking systems now in place, Clemson is primed to build on current progress and drive their STARS score even higher in future reports.



Feedback

“The great thing about StarsBI is not only is it a forward-facing tool for our stakeholders to view, but it also serves as a helpful way for us to establish our next achievable goals.”

– *Jennifer Goree*, Chair of Clemson University’s Sustainability Commission

“The information that CarbonCents’ StarsBI tool provides is breakthrough technology! StarsBI places the data needed at the fingertips of the user in a fresh and interactive method, that allows guidance to initiate and establish sustainability goals.”

– *Dave VanDeventer*, Clemson University’s Solid Waste, Recycling, and Composting Manager

Impact

The success of StarsBI extended beyond Clemson’s immediate STARS score improvement. The tool set a new standard for how sustainability data could be tracked, reported, shared, and utilized. Stakeholders are now able to make more informed decisions about sustainability strategies and initiatives moving forward. There is also an increased focus within the Clemson Sustainability Commission -- and overall larger discussion around campus -- about the execution of the Sustainability Action Plan. Clemson is now positioning themselves as a leader in sustainability reporting with StarsBI offering unlimited potential for future updates and further improvements in their STARS score.

